

Printed with support from the Waldorf Curriculum Fund

Published by
Waldorf Publications at the Research Institute for Waldorf Education
351 Fairview Avenue, Suite 625
Hudson, NY 12534

Title: 25 Chorales by J.S. Bach for Recorder Ensemble

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Director of Publications: Patrice Maynard

Cover image: Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach by Elias Gottlob Haussmann (1748); Bach-Archiv Leipzig

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# by JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH for Recorder Ensemble

Arranged by
Steve Bernstein





#### 25 CHORALES BY J.S. BACH FOR RECORDER ENSEMBLE

THERE ARE 371 four-voiced chorales harmonized by the brilliant Baroque composer, Johann Sebastian Bach. Only a few of the melodies from these chorales were written by Bach. Originating from secular folk songs and Gregorian sources, most of the melodies were already in use by the Lutheran Church. These melodies were also very popular at the time. Martin Luther, the German monk, priest, and composer, wrote the melody and lyrics to "Lob sei Gott dem Vater" ["Praise be to God the Father"] which is #4 in this collection. Bach composed the alto, tenor, and bass harmonies. The texts (lyrics) for many of the chorales have come from the Bible, and some of the more sacred texts are direct quotations from the Gospels.

A majority of the 371 harmonized chorales are part of larger works called cantatas. A *cantata* is a vocal composition with instrumental accompaniment featuring several movements differing in rhythm and key. The chorales played an important role in Bach's cantata arrangements. In most cases, his cantatas end with a chorale, and some of the cantatas feature several chorales. A motif of the chorale melody can be heard in each movement of the cantata, culminating in several movements of orchestra, chamber ensembles, and solo and choral singing. Some of Bach's most popular and extraordinary work can be found in the cantatas from *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248) and two Easter cantatas: *St Matthew Passion* (BWV 244) and *St John Passion* (BWV 245). Nine of the 25 chorales found in this collection are from these three cantatas. Four chorales (#12, #13, #16, and #18) are from *St John Passion*. Bach composed a staggering 40 movements for this Passion, ten of which are chorales. There are 215 cantatas written by J.S. Bach! Music scholars estimate that the number is closer to 300. However, many of the pieces have been either lost or found incomplete without authenticity.

Bach would often harmonize a melody in several keys. As an example, there are five different harmonizations of "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" ["O head, bloody and wounded"]. Written in the keys of D, F, and C, this chorale can be found in *St Matthew Passion* and *Christmas Oratorio*. The melody was written by Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612), a German composer during the early Baroque period. The lyrics were written by Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), a Lutheran minister who also wrote many hymn texts which Bach harmonized into chorales. Over 200 years later, Paul Simon, the American singer/songwriter, used Hassler's melody in his Baroque-sounding lament, "American Tune."

Bach was considered to be a virtuoso organist, and the chorales were not only written for singing but were also performed as solo pieces for organ. His technique of playing the bass parts (one octave below) on organ pedals was extraordinary. It's been said that J.S. Bach had the fastest feet in all of Europe!

#### THE ROLE OF EACH RECORDER IN THE CHORALES

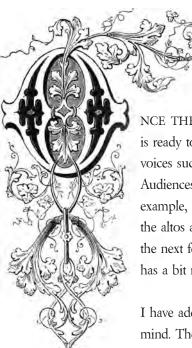
THE RECORDER QUARTET can be compared to the string quartet: The soprano and alto recorders play the roles of lst and 2nd violins, while the tenor and bass recorders play the roles of viola and cello. In the chorales the soprano will always play the melody—beautifully simple, melodic lines. The alto and tenor parts are the "inside voices," and, along with the bass parts, move independently through scale tones and arpeggios, harmonizing with each other in different combinations. The bass parts are particularly interesting in that they convey melodic lines and at the same time root the chorale. It is important to remember that a chorale is a progression of chords, and you can hear the chords changing by just listening to the bass lines.

Sometimes the soprano and alto parts will play intervals that sound out of tune (major or minor second). Bach wrote these parts to create moments of tension. Played by themselves, the two parts sound dissonant or "out," but when harmonized with the tenor and bass parts, the resulting four-part chord has enough consonance to sound "in." A great example of this is found in "Blessed Christ hath risen."(#24 in this collection) In measure six, Bach wrote the alto and soprano parts to sing A and Bflat, a minor second. (Ouch!) However, the bass and tenor are singing G and D, a perfect fifth. The resulting chord from lowest to highest is G-D-A-Bflat. The perfect fifth in the low voices softens the minor second in the high voices.



# REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE (SUGGESTIONS FOR RECORDER ENSEMBLE DIRECTORS)

AFTER TUNING THE ENSEMBLE, always practice with the scale and arpeggio that correspond to the chorale's key signature. If the piece is in a minor key, play both the natural and harmonic minor scales. Try slurring the scale tones and arpeggios as well. To work on intonation, practice playing the chords one voice at a time beginning with the bass, then tenor, alto, and soprano, holding their notes while listening to the intonation. There are plenty of examples in this collection of chorales in which the ensemble must sustain chords. Always strive for perfect intonation. Sometimes the major third can sound out of tune. There are times when the tenor and bass recorders need to be blown a little harder to be in tune. The opposite is the case for the alto, soprano, and sopranino recorders, which need to be blown softer.



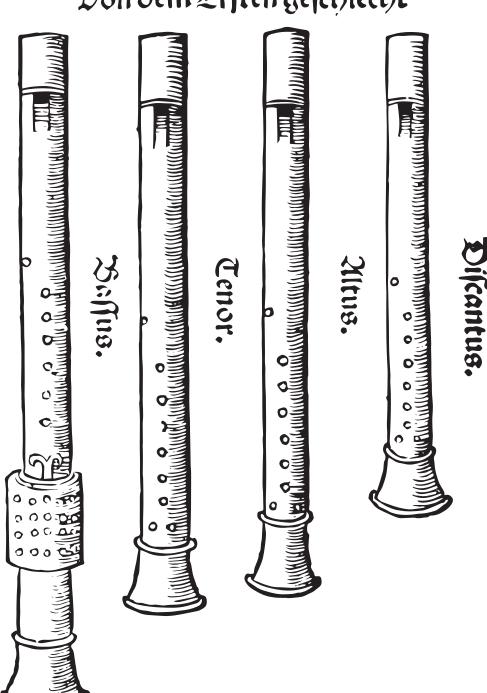
NCE THE ENSEMBLE has warmed up, begin working section by section until the group is ready to play the piece together. After a few rehearsals, try different combinations of voices such as A/T, S/B, S/A, or T/B. It's interesting to hear how these parts work together. Audiences love hearing the breakdown of a chorale and then the build-up to tutti. As an example, for an eight-measure chorale, play tutti all the way through to the end. Then have the altos and tenors play the first four measures followed by the basses and sopranos playing the next four-measure phrase. Then play tutti from the top! In this arrangement the chorale has a bit more length and some added dynamics as well.

I have added slurring to all of the chorales. This is my own interpretation with recorders in mind. The slurring would be very different if the chorales were sung. The ensemble should first learn the notes and the fingerings, then add slurring. Also, fermatas are found throughout the chorales. Fermatas, sometimes called "bird's eyes," are conducted pauses in the music. In "How brightly shines the morning star" (#9 in this collection), there are two measures of half-note chords with fermatas. These pauses create a beautiful dynamic and dramatic cadence. Try having the front stands play the fermatas with a ritard. Then conduct the whole ensemble for a dramatic a tempo.

I've been teaching the Bach chorales and Baroque music for years. The children love the satisfying way Baroque music resolves from one cadence to another. It is my hope that the Bach chorales will be challenging and fun for all who play and teach the recorder.

Steve BernsteinMarch 2020

# Von dem Ersten geschlecht





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#### Aus meines Herzens Grunde

"From the depths of my heart" BWV 269







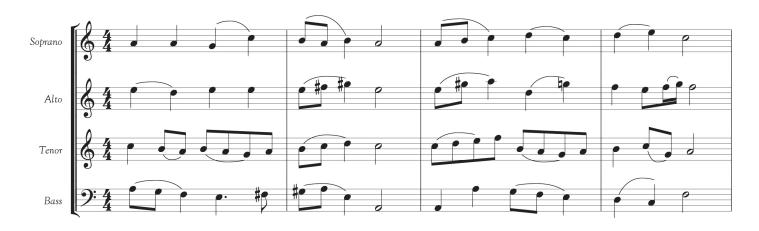
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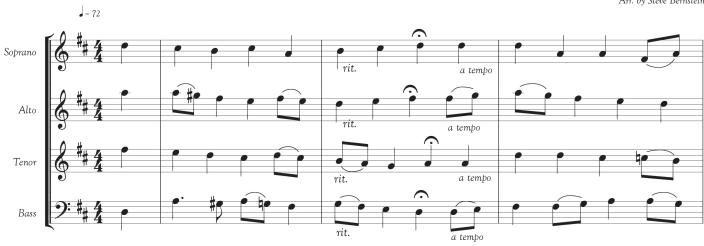
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> J.S. Bach (1685–1750) malody: Hans Leo Hassler circa 1600 arr. by Steve Bernstein







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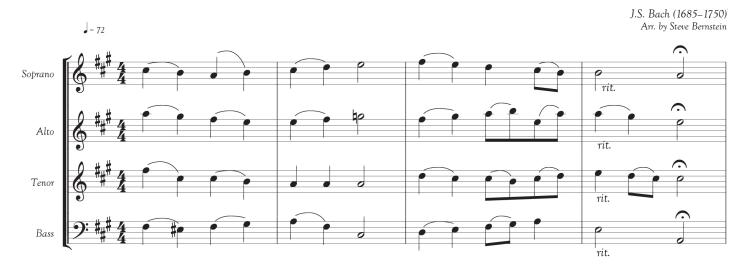
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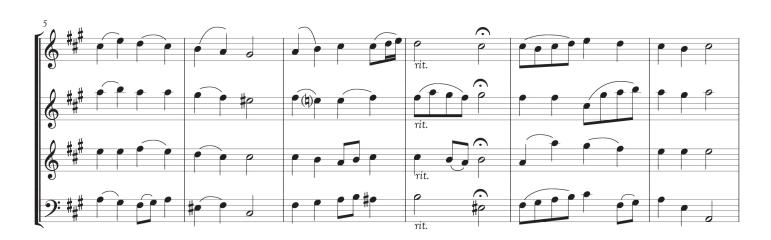
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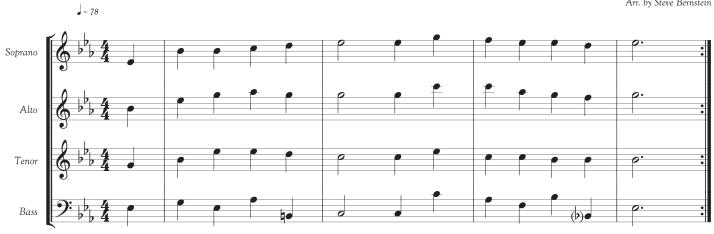




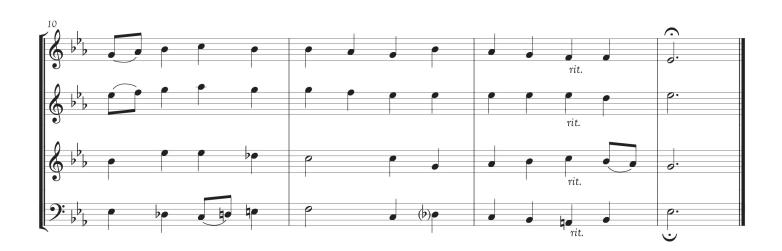


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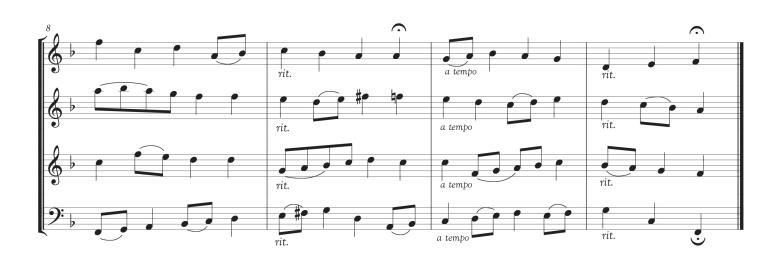


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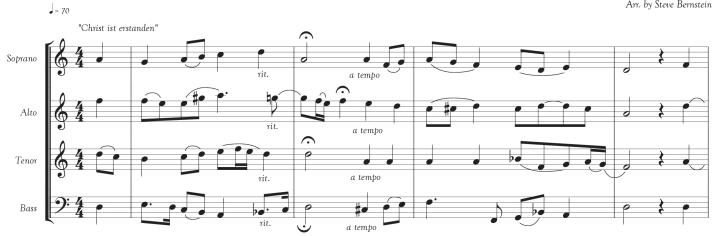
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"Christ is risen"

Chorale BWV 276 from "Four Part Chorales"









STEVE BERNSTEIN is the director of the Mountain Laurel Recorder Ensemble in New Paltz, NY. The ensemble performs with the Mountain Laurel Chamber Group locally and at other Waldorf schools in the tristate area. Steve has been arranging folk, Baroque, and popular songs since 2003 and is currently working on a book of Telemann Minuets. He also teaches chorus and plays mandolin and guitar professionally.

Steve's first book, *Recorder Ensemble First Collection* can be purchased at Waldorf Publications www.waldorfpublications.org/products/recorderensemble. Steve can be reached at sbemstein@mountainlaurel.org



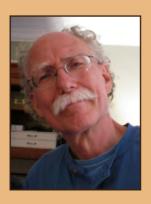
#### **APPRECIATIONS**

I WOULD LIKE TO APPRECIATE all of my colleagues at Mountain Laurel Waldorf School for their support, especially my brother, Mark Bernstein, who is the orchestra conductor. I want to also thank Preston Neel, the school's 6th grade class teacher. Mr. Neel plays all four voices of the recorder and has been a member of the Recorder Ensemble since 2003 when I became the director. Thanks to Rachel Loshak for giving me the "Chorale Book," which inspired me to begin this project. Thank you, Sarah and Megan Snow, for your beautiful art work and layout, and many thanks to Patrice Maynard at Waldorf Publications who encouraged me to pursue the works of the great master, Johann Sebastian Bach!

Playing pentatonic flutes and recorders marks one strong characteristic of the music curriculum in Waldorf schools. Helping children to practice their breathing to make beautiful music is one way to help with deep breathing in the young. It also builds capacities for listening, disciplined care of a musical instrument, strengthening community through playing with others,



and appreciation for the soothing qualities of musical tunes. The history of any culture often rings out from the works of its major composers, teaching children through the music itself.



STEVE BERNSTEIN has been arranging recorder music for many years and teaching young musicians to play recorder with joy and skill. His arrangements of these Baroque classics are perfect for middle school students, giving them challenging and masterful music to play while increasing dexterity in the fingers and their knowledge of musical structures. Steve has smoothed out some of the difficulties that can arise with musical scores not designed for the recorder family. The compositions of J.S. Bach bring a heightened intelligence and mastery like no other composer's.



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